



STATE OF CONNECTICUT • COUNTY OF TOLLAND
INCORPORATED 1786

TOWN OF ELLINGTON

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ROBERT J. CLEMENTS
Chairman

**BOARD OF FINANCE
PUBLIC HEARING
TUESDAY, APRIL 13, 2010
ELLINGTON HIGH SCHOOL**

RICHARD J. CLEARY
MARK A. JOYSE
BARRY C. PINTO
MICHAEL D. VARNEY
JOSEPH E. WEHR

Board of Finance

Members Present: R. Clements-Chairman, R. Cleary, M. Joyse, B. Pinto, J. Wehr, M. Varney

Others Present: N. DiCorleto-Fin Officer, M. Blanchette-First Selectman, S. Cullinan-Supt. of Schools, School officials, Town department heads, and residents.

Board of Finance Chairman Robert Clements opened the public hearing at 8:00 PM.

In his opening statement he stated that a zero mill increase may not be a reasonable goal and that department heads did a good job coming in at the Board of Finance guideline of zero increase except for contracted services.

He stated that the Board of Education's budget increased by 4%. Last year's cuts to their budget were devastating. Ellington ranks fifth from the bottom for the towns in Connecticut for per-pupil expenditures. The Board of Education has had to do more with less funding. The students in Ellington are scoring higher than the rest of the State on the CAPT and SATs. He stated that over 90% of Ellington students are at or above proficiency. Thirty-four students speak a language other than English as their primary language and yet they have exceeded State targets on the tests. The SAT scores for Ellington students are above the State and national averages. Enrollment as of March 2010 is 2,687; this figure is 487 more than 10 years ago. The Board of Education is doing a good job with the funds available

The General Government budget increased by \$414,000 or 3.6%. Some of the increases in this budget consist of 20 new fire hydrants in the Woodside Acres area of town and the Everbridge Community Notification System which is part of the Emergency Management Budget. The Ambulance Corp. budget is offset by revenues from their charging system. The Public Works Dept. budget increase is mainly due to salaries. Last year all Town employees agreed to defer their raises. It would not be fair to ask them a second year to do the same. There are 95.58 miles of roads to maintain. There is a decrease in the tonnages for trash and he stated that the Town is trying to encourage recycling.

The funds for Milfoil Removal are a very worthwhile expenditure as it benefits the health of Crystal Lake. This year the budget is \$25,000 to do more removal and then the budget will be for regular maintenance.

The Hall Memorial Library budget is increased due to the age of the building. This building is nearing its 20th year and things are breaking down. The Library spends \$3.53 per capita on books and media resources which is 33% below the State average so they are trying to catch up on that line item.

Under Debt Service, some debt comes off and some gets added. The computer lease for the school system will have a lower payment than the old lease that is coming off. The Bonds from 1994 and 1999 were refinanced at a lower interest rate which will save the town \$392,620 over the life of the issue. Anthem Blue Cross offered a discount to include the Life Insurance and Long Term/Short Term Disability with the Health portion of the insurance and deducted \$25,000 from the premiums. Mr. Clements stated that the Town is being proactive to get things at the lowest cost possible. The Town looks at each expenditure carefully.

The last item on his list was the Old Crystal Lake Schoolhouse. He stated that the Town has been trying to finish this project for 7 years and there is \$95,000 in this year's budget to finish it. He feels the Town should complete the project for the residents of Crystal Lake to have a meeting place.

He then opened the floor for comments or questions.

Rudy Luginbuhl, 49 Middle Butcher Rd, stated that he was on the Board of Education many years ago when the court ruled that the Board of Finance could only cut funds not line items to the Board of Education budget. He stated that at that time they made a rule that only 20% of the budget should be spent on Administrative costs. He felt that the administrative costs in the budget needed to be looked at. Superintendent Cullinan stated that the Strategic School Profile shows that Ellington spends less/pupil on administration and support services than other comparable towns in the State. Ellington spends \$840/pupil on this part of the budget which is considerable less than other town in comparison, almost 2/3 less. He felt that his biggest administrative issue is at Windermere School which has 871 students and is two schools in one but presently only has 1.6 administrators.

Paul Kellam, 112 Pinnacle Rd, stated that he sees the value in education and moved to Ellington for the ratings and education system. He felt that if the focus is only on the dollars and not the quality of the Educational system, the value of homes and his home is affected. He also suggested that a "Suggestion Box" system could be instituted for people to give their suggestions on way to cut costs.

Mr. Clements stated that seeing more people with input at the budget deliberations would be a good way to get suggestions on the table. He would like to see more residents attend the meetings.

David Joy, 23 Ellsworth Lane, noted that the budget shows that \$9.5 million of the Board of Education budget is state funded. He noted that it is 1/3 of the cost and asked if that would be increasing any time in the future. Superintendent Cullinan stated that it is 1/3 of the cost and that equates to roughly \$3,000/student. He told him that the amount is different for each town and that the State has a formula they use to determine the amount. However the State has never had funds to fully fund the formula.

Tracy Kiff-Judson, 36 Florence Ave, stated that she is a member of the Board of Education and a parent and she feels that the Board of Education budget is underfunded. She listed several programs that have been eliminated or not funded due to budget reductions, such as enrichment program at the elementary level, Art time, physical education time, football program, athletic restoration program and 8 positions eliminated last year. The overall budget decreased last year by 2.68%. She asked that the Board of Finance not underestimate the taxpayers to support the education system. She felt that being 5th from the bottom in funding per pupil in the State is not acceptable. She asked that this budget not be reduced and passed on to the voters as it stands.

Wilhelm Frederick, 1 Willi Lane, stated that he would like to see the Board of Finance not fund the Pinney House as was stated by Board of Finance members when the project first started. He noted that the budget has an \$8,000 line item in it for the Pinney House and he would like to see it removed. He also stated that the Graduation Party should not cost the town any money and that it should be removed from the budget. Years back when the party started, it was an effort by the parents of the graduating seniors to put on the party with donations. He would like to see that cut out of the budget.

Mr. Clements stated his agreement with the two items that Mr. Frederick brought up. He stated that the budget has not yet gone through deliberations and that he will vote against funding either of these items.

Michael McKillop, 10 Grant Rd, stated that the Board of Education is doing a great job and he is in support of their budget as it stands. He is in favor of funding the unfunded sports programs through the athletic restoration program.

Mr. Dale Printy, 8 Benjamin Drive, echoed Mr. McKillop's comments and stated that he runs the Ellington Roadrunners football and cheerleading program and that enrollment is at record levels. He wanted to point out the interest in sports that is prevalent in Ellington.

Laurie Burstein, 10 Woodland Trail, also spoke her support for the Education system and budget.

Board of Finance Chairman Robert Clements closed the hearing at 9:10 PM.

Respectfully submitted,



Lori Smith, Recording Secretary